HEATING UP: AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER GELDERLOOS ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE FIGHT TO CHANGE EVERYTHING

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From It's going down (19/09/2023) …

This summer brought yet another record heat wave, as climate change fueled disasters hit countries around the world, leaving human communities devastated by flooding, wildfires, and storms. While this "new normal" has brought climate change to the forefront of popular consciousness, we've also seen the far-Right spinning new conspiracies and the neoliberal center pushing the same tired consumerist lifestyle changes as false solutions.

In this context, we sat down with long-time anarchist author and organizer Peter Gelderloos, to talk about the present moment, the path ahead for autonomous movements, and the harsh realities in front of us.

IGD: You address climate change in your book, *The Solutions Are Already Here,* what do you make of the current moment that we are in?

Peter Gelderloos: I think we are in a very critical moment where mainstream voices are identifying a tipping point in relation to recent and recurring extreme

weather events, like the hottest Northern Hemisphere summer in recorded history, what's been called the worst flooding in Greek history after a rare Mediterranean tropical storm, with the heavy rains coming just weeks after the largest wildfires ever recorded in Europe, the very first tropical storm warning in California owing to a rare Pacific hurricane, the largest wildfires in recorded history in so-called Canada…

I think this is such a critical moment because the way the media, NGOs, academics, and governments are conditioning us to think about the crisis is simultaneously an enormous lie and an enormous truth. First the truth: the way that the Earth's atmosphere has been altered is visible in our every day lives, it is killing people, and it is getting worse. This truth is important because it means it is an urgent question of our survival – and therefore a legitimate question of self-defense – and it reaffirms that we can trust our own experiences and observations, provided we are actually rooted in and attentive towards the world around us. We can fit our daily lives and our experience in one corner of the world into a solidaristic and cohesive global narrative.

The lie is this: that these deaths are unprecedented, that climate change is an appropriate framework for understanding these deaths, and that we can trust current scientific models around tipping points, around predictions of "when it's too late," around carbon offset and emissions reductions schemes.

IGD: Was there a turning point – whatever that means – this summer? It seems we've reached a peak within popular consciousness with the record heat wave. Does this mean anything?

Peter Gelderloos: There was not a tipping point, and the apparent peak in consciousness has been a triumph of false consciousness. Because the truth is it

was too late a long time ago. Depending on where you look in the world and what forms of life you decide to value, it was too late one thousand years ago, it was too late 531 years ago, it was too late 101 years ago, it was too late 50 years ago.

The truth is that for decades already, entire ecosystems and many of the species that make them up have been completely destroyed, for decades already tens of million of humans are dying every year as a result of this broad ecological crisis, and for centuries the extractivist societal forms responsible for the ecological crisis have been colonizing and eradicating the societal forms that take care of their ecosystems and that also tend to resist human-to-human oppressions.

The truth is that while the scientific method for producing knowledge does have a demonstrable value, models for predicting ecosystemic tipping points and the rate of climatic change have proven largely unreliable and generally conservative, so that specific branch of science has demonstrated is too faulty to bear any strategic weight when we are facing life-and-death choices.

The truth is that "climate crisis" is a framework that belongs to those who are trying to murder us and profit off it. The climate is just one part of a greater and interconnected crisis, and if we only focus on the climate, we will never see the root causes and the worst forms of suffering that are going on. This crisis is not caused by humans. It is not "anthropogenic." It is caused by those humans who have given their lives over to a framework of institutions that are extractivist and oppressive to their cores, institutions that have the power to force the rest of us into line and participate in their life-devouring society whether we choose to resist or choose to look the other way. This framework, fundamentally, means the State.

As I demonstrated in *Worshiping Power* all states are extractivist and all states in history have been ecocidal. A shared trait of those who want to reform Leviathan,

whether these are XR campaigners, climate researchers, paid NGO activists, authoritarian Marxists, or crypto-authoritarians, is that they try to hide or decenter the role of the State in this crisis. Previously, states only provoked regional ecological collapses, which was one major impetus for their systematic turn towards colonial expansion.

The extractivist systems that states represent, though, must expand or die. Since the revolutions that have been overthrowing states for thousands of years were not able to cultivate a sufficiently global and systemic consciousness, the only other option was that states would create a world system. And this means inventing the possibility of a global ecological crisis. The modern state found a suitable engine in capitalism, and it found a world-devouring worldview capable of organizing intercontinental colonization in white supremacy. On Planet Earth, there is no capitalism that is not colonial and thus racial, there is no capitalism without the State, and there is no state that is not extractivist and patriarchal and thus ecocidal and oppressive, an enemy to all life.

IGD: This summer, we saw both a slew of neoliberal articles on 'life hacks' on how to adjust your body to extreme temperatures as well as in Greece, a wave of anti-migrant sentiment as fires rages and conspiracy theories spread. How do we push back against this?

Peter Gelderloos: It is inevitable that when we have a false consciousness around a crisis like this, the hegemonic responses will be individualistic–privileging the consumer with money to spend ethically, the citizen with the right to vote for better candidates, both of them revitalizing the institutions that have caused this crisis–or they will promote pseudo-communities like the nation-state, with their artificial, bloody borders, and their ready cast of scapegoats and villains, who are nearly always pure inventions or more oppressed groups of people,

simultaneously internal and external, always too foreign to comprehend and close enough to pose a threat.

Fortunately there is a synthesis between strategies and goals when we are honest with ourselves about what we are facing. Patriarchal society and colonial capitalism, organized by the State, are the enemy to all life. They have proven we cannot share this planet with them, and we do not need to because they are not living beings. They are a hard limit. Only up to that limit is it possible to have a world in which many worlds fit.

The major strategic obstacles to destroying the State are the two arms of the State, the Left and the Right (understanding Left in its historical sense and not in its amnesiac anglophone non-sense, in which it is reputed to mean vague, unspecified, good, incoherent things). To generalize, the Left renews, updates, and revitalizes oppressive structures, giving us Black cops, women millionaires, and recycled toilet paper, and the Right punishes resistance with the attempt to eradicate it. When you get into the messy details, the Left also carries out policing, and the Right also tries to renew oppressive structures like the nation-state, but the point is they both serve the State. In moments of social peace, they are more coordinated, in moments of social upheaval like the present one, they are unable to see past their alibi-giving mythologies and increasingly suspect one another of being a threat to Leviathan as a whole.

IGD: We're seeing things like eco-systems being hit in big ways due to ice melting and other signs of life support systems being impacted – what do you see happening in the coming years that we should be ready for that is going to impact the situation here in so-called North America?

Peter Gelderloos: That question needs to be answered within every specific bioregion, with their specific human and ecological histories. The consumerist patterns of movement that are prevalent in North America, especially in middle-class circles, make it impossible to create those answers. An inability to listen also makes it impossible. Men and white people are all socialized not to listen, so we need to emphasize learning how to. Those who have bought into Western civilization, who, for example, treat their smartphones with more respect than they do people around them, are never going to be able to come up with adequate, rooted answers to the question of surviving-together. Anyone who scoffs at the idea of listening to migratory birds, to forests, to mountains, have no fucking clue and will not even be capable of finding the real conversation that is providing these answers.

Here is an analytical tool that might help. What defines a person? We should consider that a person is any being with whom dialogue is possible and meaningful. Therefore a cop or a millionaire, while human, are not people. The blue jay outside my window is a person. Let's give our attention and care to people, since if they are people we can share a world with them. Let's aim our rage and our destructive abilities at the institutions and their loyal robots, because they will never share a world with us.

IGD: The big climate movement is off the streets right at a time when things are at their worst. As anarchists and participants in autonomous movements, what's the way forward?

Peter Gelderloos: This is also a conversation that I think needs to happen in every corner of the world, though I suspect a smaller number of patterns will stand out than in the conversation about what each particular ecosystem needs to do to survive and adapt.

In the past twenty years, on every continent, we have toppled long-standing regimes, we have defeated the police, we have helped an anti-racist, anti-colonial, and ecological consciousness temporarily become the norm, and we have helped marginalized groups win more spaces for survival, for healing, for joy. (Not a we helping a them but a we-among-us helping ourselves and another we-among-us standing in solidarity with others among us helping themselves.) We've accomplished things that in the prior two decades seemed unimaginable.

And our wave of powerful rebellions clearly preceded the economic downturn of 2007/2008. It is vital to remember this and pass this memory on, especially because the priests of materialism are clawing back out of their well deserved graves to try to tell us that we are objects secondary to the calculations of global monetary systems, despite how deadly wrong they proved to be the last time we gave them a hearing, a few generations back. We are not those objects. We are living beings, battered by numerous intersecting oppressive systems that operate in both quantifiable and unquantifiable ways, and we make choices, and those choices matter. We are neither individuals nor identical objects.

Since that wave of rebellions, though, we have lost ground in most places around the world. We need to ask ourselves why, thoroughly and unafraid of what we might learn, and we must share those lessons because our survival depends on them.

I believe in many places we will find that we succumbed to repression, because we had not learned the lessons of previous generations on how to survive it and because we have not valued the roles of care and healing and survival as much as we have valued the role of the attack. And I say that as someone who has spent my life trying to build our capacity to attack and to validate those attacks, given how pacified we were in the '90s and '00s. But no oppressive society can be

destroyed by negation alone, and those who attack need to also know how to survive the reactions to those attacks.

In other places, we have succumbed to authoritarian currents taking over social movements and spaces of rebellion. (In truth, repression and recuperation always happen together, but one of the two might be predominant, one might fail and then the next succeed.) The repressive forces of the State are immense, and when we can't withstand them, the most we can do is lick our wounds and identify what we might have done better. However, when movements and spaces of resistance leave us behind, it is nearly always a direct result of internal failures that were not inevitable.

Did we uphold norms around participation that favored those with more resources–the university educated, the middle class, the neurotypical, people without trauma or chronic health problems, people without children or others to take care, people with citizenship, white people? Did we reproduce patriarchal value systems around communication styles, around what forms of struggle are celebrated and rewarded, what forms are ignored, what forms are exploited?

Did we forget our history and enter into non-critical alliances with NGOs and political parties, or sideline ourselves with an expedient acceptance of a single-issue focus, a reformist framework? Did we repeat the great error of antifascism and see only the Right as a danger, while giving a pass to democracy or authoritarian socialists? Did we create a new error of nihilism, so that the historically valid critiques offered by insurrectionalism were drowned in a renewed fetishism of armed groups (ironic, given the exact context the insurrectionary critique was reacting to).

Did we let ourselves be conditioned by dogmatism or the architecture of social networks and create spaces of resistance that were so toxic, only bullies and sycophants could thrive there? Did we fail to develop practices of survival, of healing, of transformation, of mutual growth, so that all we had was a hammer and all we could see were nails?

Did we fail to connect struggles in decentralized ways, spreading logics of solidarity that allowed everyone to support and learn from one another, while not allowing anyone to take over? Did we forget to develop strategies for the day after, how to spread joyous, meaningful life, once we'd burnt everything? Have we lost the ability to imagine being anything else, creating anything else, living any other way?

IGD: Tell us how you are doing – you recently had a fundraiser for your health, how can people support you?

Peter Gelderloos: I am doing, alternately, terribly and wonderfully, which is normal for me since I'm bipolar. My tumor is considered incurable but treatable, so from a doctor's point of view it's a question of extending life expectancy, improving their stats. That's not how I'm going to approach my life and my death.

I'll get the support I need from myself and those closest to me. Anyone reading this because I have a platform because books or whatever, I would ask them to think about a few things. Many more people are getting cancer and other fatal or chronic health problems. Sickness is not an individual affair. Our world is sick. People deserve whatever space they need as they heal or as they die, but the sickness itself cannot remain private. We need to put our tumors, our inflammations, our breakdowns, our tears, our dead, carry them with bloody hands and put them on capitalism's doorstep. Not to demand compensation or redress,

but as the only explanation we need, the only possible word of truth, before we burn it all down, Leviathan and all those who choose to defend it instead of defending life.

Suffering cannot keep happening behind these metaphorically closed doors. Those who take care of us when we are suffering are our truest comrades. Learn from them and take care of them, for fuck's sake.

Don't support me, support all of us. This is a collective problem.

Maybe we could foster struggles that are worth living for and dying for. Maybe we could imagine worlds where we'd actually like to live, where we'd feel grateful to lay our bodies down once our time has come.

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